

# RELIGION ACROSS BORDERS

Transnational Immigrant Networks



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ALTAMIRA PRESS 2002  
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Walnut Creek • Lanham • New York • Oxford

## Chinese Christian Transnationalism Diverse Networks of a Houston Church

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Diversity is the most notable feature of the transnational ties characteristic of the Chinese immigrant churches in the United States. These congregations commonly maintain transnational ties with people, churches, and parachurch organizations in several societies across the Pacific and elsewhere. The most dense and important connections are with Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, and Southeast Asia; ties also extend to Canada, South and Central America, Australia and New Zealand, Europe, and even Africa. This is in clear contrast to the biregional or binational connections documented in other chapters and other writings (Levitt 1998, 2001; Menjivar 1999). Vietnamese and Indian immigrant congregations, given their wide spread of the recent migrants across various parts of the world, may also maintain some multinational ties.

The diverse transnational ties characteristic of Chinese Christian congregations is due mainly to the fact that most such churches in the United States have a cosmopolitan membership (Yang 1998), including immigrants from different Chinese provinces, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and ethnic Chinese from various countries in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. These immigrants often sojourn in other places in Southeast Asia and North America before settling down. Moreover, the tendency of Chinese churches to remain independent in organization and their evangelical theological orientation allow and promote multiple transnational ties (Yang 1999). About half the Chinese churches in the United States today are nondenominational, and a large proportion of denominational ones are affiliated with nonhierarchical denominations that grant substantial independence to local congregations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention. Such independence enables a church to open its doors to receive people from diverse denominations, many of which are associated with particular geographic locations.<sup>1</sup> The evangelical orientation drives

Chinese Christians to strengthen old ties and develop new ones in other parts of the world for the purpose of gaining converts.

In the multidimensional, multilayer, and multitype networks of Chinese Christian transnationalism, a large church, a major organization, or a leader with charisma may serve as a nexus node. The Houston Chinese Church, which is called the Chinese Gospel Church in the RENIR I project (Yang, in Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000),<sup>2</sup> is one such active node. In this chapter, I first describe this church and its membership and then develop a typology of transnational ties in order to provide a framework for describing its complex ties and networks. This is followed by descriptions of the transnational ties that link the Houston Chinese Church with Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, and other parts of the world. I conclude the chapter with further reflections about Chinese Christian transnational networks.

Data in this chapter come from my ethnographic fieldwork in Houston in 1997–99 and in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China in the summer of 2000.<sup>3</sup> In Hong Kong, an informational and organizational center of the Chinese diaspora, I interviewed leaders of major Chinese Christian organizations that have strong connections with Chinese churches in the United States, conducted participant observation at Sunday services at three churches that have a sizable number of returned immigrants, and interviewed some returned immigrants at these churches. The three churches include a Mandarin-speaking non-denominational church whose members are originally from Taiwan and mainland China, a Cantonese-speaking Alliance church that has a Mandarin service, and an English-speaking Anglican church that had just set up a Mandarin-speaking congregation for mainland Chinese who have either returned from Western countries or come directly from the mainland. In Taiwan, I visited Taipei, the capital, and Xinzhu, a newly developed city with a concentration of highly advanced technologies that has attracted many returned immigrants. In Xinzhu, I attended the Sunday service of a Lutheran church with a majority of returned immigrants. In Taipei, I attended worship services at three churches, one Presbyterian, one Ling Liang, and one Libaitang; all are Mandarin-speaking. In Taipei and Xinzhu, I interviewed former members of the Houston Chinese Church and other Christians who once lived in the United States. I also interviewed leaders of major Christian organizations and churches that are known to have strong connections with the United States. In mainland China, I visited five cities and talked with many Christian believers and leaders. Supplementing the ethnographic data are my longtime observations of Chinese Christian churches in other parts of the United States and information from Chinese Christian newsletters and magazines.

## The Houston Chinese Church

The Houston Chinese Church (HCC) has three characteristics that are common among Chinese Christian churches in the United States: It is evangelical in theology, it is independent in organization, and its members are from different nations (Yang 2000). The membership of HCC, however, is bigger than most Chinese American churches, with about 2,000 to 2,500 in the original and daughter churches in the Houston area, which allows it to have more extensive transnational ties than most of its counterparts.

The HCC grew out of a fellowship group that first met in 1972 and was officially incorporated in 1975 with about eighty founding members. Sunday attendance increased fast, reaching 250 by the end of 1976 and about 600 in 1982. After fluctuations during the rest of the 1980s due to a major economic downturn that drove many immigrants to leave Houston, growth resumed in the 1990s; the congregation numbered more than 800 in 1993. In 1979, HCC planted a church in a southeastern suburb of Houston, in 1991 another in west Houston, and in 1997 yet another church in a southwestern suburb. The mother and three daughter churches all maintain large attendances, ranging from 300 to 800 adults. The HCC has also planted or aided in the establishment of several Chinese churches in other Texas cities, including College Station in central Texas, Port Lavaca and Corpus Christi in southern Texas, and Lubbock in northern Texas. Moreover, in 1997, HCC started a mission church in Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic in central Asia. The HCC remains at the center of these local, regional, and international networks.

The HCC is not a transplanted church originally organized by a congregation or denomination in another country. It was formed by a group of Chinese immigrant professionals and students attending educational institutions in Houston, and from the very beginning, the origins of its members have been diverse. Some came from Hong Kong (a British colony until 1997), some from Taiwan (the Republic of China), and some from various Southeast Asian countries. Among them, many were born in mainland China and had fled from the wars and the Chinese Communists. What united the founding members was the desire to have a Chinese church of their own that would meet their needs and reach out to other new Chinese immigrants.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the 1980s, many immigrants and students from China (the People's Republic of China) and American-born Chinese who moved to Houston from other states have joined this church as well, increasingly expanding its cosmopolitan scope.

The acceptance of members from diverse origins is encouraged by the independent nature of the church. Most of the founding members had been Christians before coming to the United States but belonged to different denominations,

those reflecting either Western missionary influences or indigenous Chinese sects. Before the incorporation of the church, fellowship gatherings were held at a Chinese Baptist church. However, when the church was officially incorporated, the founding members decided to become nondenominational so that any Chinese Christian, no matter what the denominational background or geographic origin, could join. In fact, throughout North America, Chinese Christians have a strong tendency toward antidenominationalism. Their desires for both Christian unity and Chinese unity augment each other (Yang 1998), resulting in greater cosmopolitanism among church members.

Since its very beginning, HCC has been an evangelical church with a strong missionary commitment. Local evangelism has been very successful as witnessed by its growth in membership and the planting of daughter churches in the Houston area and elsewhere in Texas. The HCC also has dedicated a significant proportion of its resources to overseas missions. Two years after its establishment, in 1977, a Missions Committee was formed, which later evolved into a Missions Department with its own separate budget. The Missions Department constantly explores new opportunities for overseas missions while maintaining existing operations. Since the beginning, the church has provided financial as well as spiritual support to missionaries and Christian organizations outside the United States. Between 1975 and 1995, sixty-four church members gave up their professional careers and entered seminaries; some of them later became missionaries to other countries. The HCC has sent out its own missionaries who were supported completely or mostly by HCC. The drive for overseas evangelistic missions has promoted transnational ties to places both with and without previous connections.

Meanwhile, the turnover rate of HCC membership has been high because of the highly mobile nature of contemporary Chinese migration. Many immigrant members came to Houston after first studying and living in other parts of North America, and many have moved elsewhere after a few years of studying or working in Houston. Some have moved back to Asia. One of the most mobile groups within the church is the Student Fellowship for international students, composed of a Mandarin Student Fellowship group and a Cantonese Student Fellowship group. Taken together, the Student Fellowship has remained one of the largest fellowship groups in the church throughout its twenty-five-year history, although individuals come and go every year. These students, and the transient immigrants as well, did not come from one particular place, nor do they return to one particular place. However, no matter where they go, they usually take one invisible tie with them. Because of its various strengths, many former members of HCC are proud of having been a member and try to maintain some ties with the church or its members.

Given the large and diverse membership of HCC, it is impossible to trace all its ties to one particular church, village, city, district, or province in one home

country. Nor is it possible to trace all the transnational ties HCC and its members maintain. To facilitate the description and understanding of its diverse and numerous transnational ties, a classification of various types of ties is useful.

### Four Types of Transnational Ties

There are four types of transnational ties that the local Chinese immigrant church and its members maintain: individual to individual, individuals to organizations, the church to individuals, and the church to organizations (see table 7.1).

The transnational ties between individual members of HCC and individuals in other parts of the world are the most numerous. These ties are informal, fluctuating, and yet resilient. As long as a member maintains contacts with family members, relatives, or friends on another shore of the Pacific, a string is stretched out. Of course, these strings vary in strength and intensity. However, given the ease of communication and transportation, many such ties are indeed well maintained through postal letters, e-mail, long-distance phone calls, and mutual visits. Many church members take business or vacation trips to the home country, and at any given time there are no fewer than a dozen temporarily visiting relatives attending HCC along with church members. These visitors are usually the parents of immigrant professionals who either do not want to live permanently in the United States or cannot stay long because of U.S. immigration restrictions. Some of these visiting parents have converted to Christianity during their visit, then returned to

**Table 7.1. Types of Transnational Ties between the Houston Chinese Church (HCC) and Other Nations**

	<i>Individuals (Overseas)</i>	<i>Organizations (Overseas)</i>
Individual members (HCC)	Family members and relatives Former church co-members or co-workers Former colleagues Fellow school alumni Friends Missionaries	As donors/supporters As speakers (in private capacity) As authors As board members or trustees As regional representatives
Church (HCC)	Supports missionaries Supports seminarians Supports ministers Supports returned immigrants	Supports Christian organizations Supports seminaries Supports churches Supports associations Supports special task forces

Taiwan, Hong Kong, or mainland China. Some church members have also helped bring their siblings, relatives, or close friends to study or work in Houston. Of course, some people have all their family members and close relatives in Houston or in the United States and thus do not actively maintain transnational ties any longer. However, such families are few at this young church. Even these people, driven by a sense of mission and/or evangelistic church programs, may develop or renew transnational ties.

Some persons maintain more than one string across the Pacific. Among post-1965 Chinese immigrants, some have sojourned in several places before settling down in Houston. Many immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong were born in mainland China but fled from the wars and the Chinese Communists in the 1940s and 1950s, wandered around Southeast Asia, and then came to North America for higher education or jobs. In each of the places they once studied or worked, they may have left family members, relatives, good friends, or Chinese churches they once attended.

Many HCC members also maintain relationships with churches and parachurch organizations<sup>5</sup> in other places. They might have belonged to a church or worked at or benefited from a parachurch organization's ministries before coming to Houston. They often continue to contribute money, knowledge, time, organizational skills, and other resources to these Christian organizations. Some lay leaders, as well as clergy, frequently travel to Asia to preach, lecture, or participate in board meetings in their private capacity (not as a representative of HCC), and the clergy sometimes use their vacation time for such trips without receiving financial subsidies from HCC. Occasionally, parachurch organizations in Asia send solicitation letters or representatives to Houston, where some members may be inspired to contribute money and other resources to them. The church may or may not be formally involved in this process. Like ties between individuals, this type of tie between individuals and organizations is informal from HCC's perspective.

The formal transnational ties are those that HCC officially supports, often through its Missions Department. First, HCC supports many individual missionaries, ministers, and staff members of Christian organizations in Asia and other parts of the world. Most often, HCC provides partial financial support and requests that those they support provide regular reports about their ministries. The HCC has also sent out missionaries to Asia and South and Central America and provided full financial support. Second, HCC provides financial support to Christian parachurch organizations, seminaries, churches, and transnational Christian associations in Asia, Europe, and the Americas. These formal relationships between this church and overseas individuals and organizations are established through formal procedures. A church member may propose to the Missions Department that it support an individual or organization, or an individual or organization may ini-

tiate the contact with the Missions Department to seek support. After the Missions Department reviews the applications and consults the pastors, it makes recommendations to the Church Council, the decision-making body. The decision of the Church Council then is sent to the congregation for confirmation. Given this structure of procedures, formal ties between the church and overseas individuals and organizations are limited in number but relatively stable. In order to maintain a sense of intimacy, the Missions Department always designates particular individuals to keep in regular contact with the supported individuals and organizations. These designated persons encourage other church members to write encouraging letters to the missionaries or missionary organizations. In return, the missionaries respond with prayer letters to the church and/or to individual members.

The transnational ties may shift from one type to another. For example, an informal connection between a pastor and his missionary friend can be transformed into a formal one when HCC officially supports him. Similarly, the formal ties between the church and individuals can be assigned to church members who, in turn, may nurture more personal relationships. These multidimensional, multilayer, and multitype transnational ties are interwoven to form thick transnational networks around this local church. The HCC thus serves as a very active node in the myriad Chinese Christian transnational networks that link a number of countries and regions, with the densest ties in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and somewhat dense ties in mainland China and Southeast Asia; there are also some ties with other parts of the world.

## Hong Kong

The most prominent transnational ties between HCC and Hong Kong are those linking pastors. The senior pastor, Rev. David Chan, was born in Macao during World War II, grew up in Hong Kong, and was an active youth leader in a Baptist church there. He studied at the Christian and Missionary Alliance Seminary in Hong Kong and earned a bachelor's degree. Later he went to Singapore to teach at the Singapore Bible College. During his tenure there, he took a leave and spent some years studying at a Baptist seminary in the United States. He was the dean of the Singapore Bible College before becoming HCC pastor in 1978. The associate pastor, Rev. William Hsueh, a few years younger than Rev. Chan, was born and grew up in Hong Kong and attended the same Baptist church. He went to Japan for college study; earned a Ph.D. in chemical engineering in the United States; worked in Taipei at a medical school; returned to the United States to attend a seminary; ministered to a Chinese church in St. Louis, Missouri, for fourteen years; and joined HCC in the mid-1990s. These two pastors maintain personal ties with some members of that Hong Kong church where they were youth members.



These individual transnational ties between HCC pastors and Hong Kong Christians have become more formal. Both pastors have been invited back to lead evangelistic meetings, retreats, and workshops at this church, their *mu hui* (original, or mother, church). Reverend Chan taught some intensive courses for a couple of years at the Hong Kong Alliance Seminary, his alma mater. This seminary has become one of only a few prestigious seminaries with graduate programs in Southeast Asia. Its students come not only from Hong Kong but also from Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries. Some seminarians and graduates who once took Rev. Chan's course like to claim to be his students; as a consequence, this expands his individual ties throughout Southeast Asia. In 1999, the vice president of the Alliance Seminary came to North America on a fund-raising tour on which Houston was one of about a dozen stops. As an alum of the seminary and personal friend of the seminary vice president, Rev. Chan hosted the delegation, provided a platform at HCC for their fund-raising activities, and helped assemble interested Christians in other Chinese churches in the Houston area to hear the delegation. The HCC also officially supports the Hong Kong Alliance Seminary with regular donations.

While the flow of money is mostly from North America to Asia, including Hong Kong,<sup>6</sup> the flow of Christian publications is mostly in the opposite direction. Among numerous theological and pastoral books, the most notable is a bilingual hymnal book. The *Hymns of Life* (*Shengming Shengshi*) was published in 1986 by the Alliance Press in Hong Kong. This has become the most popular hymnal book in Chinese Christian churches in the United States and Canada, including HCC. The HCC has a library and an in-house bookstore that sells Christian books to its members. Four-fifths of the books are in Chinese, and the vast majority of those are published in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

An important tie also exists between Rev. William Hsueh, the associate pastor of HCC, and his brother Theodore, the president of Hong Kong-based Christian Communications Ltd (CCL). The CCL was formed in 1971 and has been one of the major publishers of Christian books and magazines in Hong Kong. It also provides leadership training and pilgrimage tours to Israel and sends missionaries to mainland China. The CCL established regional offices in Taiwan (1973), the United States (1982), Canada (1989), Singapore (1990), and Malaysia (1994) and subsequently became Christian Communications International (CCI). As CCI president, Theodore Hsueh frequently travels to the United States and other countries. The Hsueh brothers also co-host a monthly column on a website discussing Christian ministries. Interestingly, this column is maintained by someone whose e-mail address is in Singapore.

The U.S. regional CCI office was originally located in Chicago. In the mid-1990s, about the time William Hsueh came to Houston, some HCC lay leaders

took the initiative to move its major operations to Houston. Elder Lee, a high-ranking manager at an oil company and a lay leader at HCC who is originally from Hong Kong, is the president of the CCI USA board of trustees. Under his leadership, CCI USA runs a Christian bookstore in a big shopping mall, has a full-time minister to provide leadership training to local churches, and has organized pastors to go to China to train leaders of underground churches. Besides the personal connection between HCC and CCI through Rev. Hsueh and Mr. Lee, HCC also organizationally supports CCI USA. In fact, CCI USA's full-time minister was on the pastoral staff of HCC for many years and is now considered an HCC missionary with full financial support. In addition, a former interim pastor of HCC during the 1970s whom HCC continues to support as an evangelist in the United States sits on the international CCI board of directors.

Besides the formal connections and personal ties between HCC leaders and Hong Kong individuals and organizations, ordinary HCC members also have various ties with Hong Kong Christianity. Some former HCC members returned to live in Hong Kong, although they do not go to one particular church there. Because HCC does not keep a record of such members, I was unable to follow any such ties and meet Hong Kong returnees. Some of these people move back and forth across the Pacific repeatedly. One example is HCC's music minister, who was hired in 1999. Reverend Jonathan Ling was born and grew up in Hong Kong, immigrated to the United States along with his parents, worked as a youth pastor at a Chinese Baptist church in Houston for several years, and then returned to Hong Kong to work as the music minister at a church. His parents have been members of HCC for many years, and eventually their son moved back to Houston to be with them. In such cases, constantly shifting personal and formal ties are mixed and hard to separate.

The HCC's informal and formal connections with Hong Kong also include other major parachurch organizations, seminaries, churches, and their staff members. Among them, the most active include those with the Fellowship of Evangelical Students (FES), the Breakthrough Organization, the China Graduate School of Theology (CGST), and the Chinese Coordination Center of World Evangelism (CCCOWE). The FES is a campus Christian organization affiliated with the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship International. Its ministries are mostly with middle school and high school students. Most HCC members who came from Hong Kong had once participated in some of its activities and programs. The Breakthrough Organization, a spin-off from FES, is a Christian social service organization. Its president is a Canadian-trained physician and has mobilized conservative Chinese Christians across the Pacific to engage in social services. The CGST was established in 1975 as a result of a Chinese indigenous movement, initiated in the 1960s, by a group of Chinese seminarians attending Westminster Theological Seminary in

Philadelphia. All its more than twenty faculty are ethnic Chinese who had studied, lived, and worked in the United States, Canada, or Britain. The HCC has sent some seminary students to CGST, the latest being a woman who was born and grew up in Hong Kong and then immigrated to the United States. While working as a professional in Houston and attending HCC, she dedicated herself to Christ and became a missionary to central Asia. In 1998, HCC sent her to study at CGST. The CCCOWE is the most encompassing worldwide Chinese Christian association and was also a result of a movement started first in the United States. In 1972, the first North American Congress of Chinese Evangelicals was held in California, and it called for united evangelical efforts. It subsequently expanded to Asia and other parts of the world, and the first Chinese Congress of World Evangelism was held in 1976 in Hong Kong. Following this, headquarters were established in Hong Kong, and a U.S.-based, Chinese Christian leader, Rev. Thomas Wang, became the general secretary for ten years. Now CCCOWE has fifty-five district committees around the world. Reverend David Chan, the senior pastor of HCC, is the chair of the Southwest U.S. District Committee.

## Taiwan

For many years, about two-thirds of HCC members had migrated from Taiwan, although some had originally been born in mainland China. Taiwanese remain about 50 percent of the current HCC members. The young Chinese pastor, Rev. Paul Hu, is a native Taiwanese. In the early 1990s, he came to the United States to attend graduate school, converted to Christianity, and then entered a seminary. The HCC supported him as an evangelist ministering to Taiwanese immigrants in other Texas cities until 1998, when he became an HCC pastor. Reverend Hu's parents are still in Taiwan, as are family members of many other HCC members. As mentioned earlier, Associate Pastor Rev. Hsueh worked in Taipei for several years in the 1970s before returning to the United States for seminary education.

Many of the most important connections between HCC and Taiwan involve immigrants who have returned to live in Taiwan. Among the people whom I interviewed in Taiwan, I found three types of returnees. Some came to North America to study for a graduate degree and did not want to settle down there. On receiving their degree and sometimes some work experience, they returned to Taiwan. For them, the United States had always been considered only a sojourning place for education and work. They usually do not have much emotional attachment to the United States, although many do maintain some contacts with people in the United States. The second type of returnees are those who have physically and psychologically settled down in the United States, consider it their home, and regard Taiwan as only a sojourning place for temporary work. Holding

American passports and maintaining regular contacts with relatives and friends in the United States, they plan to retire in the United States. Some hope that within a few years their company will open a branch in the United States so that they can move back. They definitely want their children to go to American universities, and to prepare for that they send their children to American schools in Taiwan that follow American curricula. The third type of returnees are transnationals in the literal sense who simultaneously maintain homes in Taiwan and in the United States. Some leave their wives and children behind in the United States, and some bring their families with them to Taiwan but return to their U.S. home for holidays and vacations.

In Taiwan, I visited a returned family, the Wangs, whom I befriended when I did my initial fieldwork at HCC. This family represents the second type of returnees. Both Dr. and Mrs. Wang, in their forties, were born and grew up in Taipei, came to the United States for graduate study in the 1980s, and settled in Houston. At HCC, they served as advisers to the Mandarin Student Fellowship, whose international students called them "big brother" and "big sister" or "sister-in-law." In 1998, responding to a call from a close friend who had returned to Taiwan, Mr. Wang quit his job at a research lab in Houston, sold their house, and returned to Taiwan to join his friend at a start-up company. Before going to the United States to attend graduate school, the Wangs had belonged to different churches in Taipei. Now they attend the wife's church, where, despite a very busy work schedule, Mr. Wang has become a member of its church council. Their two American-born children attend an American school in Taipei that teaches in English but offers Chinese lessons. Before my visit to Taiwan, I asked the HCC senior pastor to give me a list of former HCC members in Taiwan. He told me that he did not have such a list and that I did not need one. "You know Mr. Wang well, right? Contact him. He should be able to get all the people together." However, when I asked about other former HCC members in Taipei, Dr. Wang told me that they did not really keep in touch because they were scattered all around and everyone was very busy. He told me that when the senior pastor had visited Taipei about a year earlier, a dozen or so former HCC members/families did manage to come together to receive him. However, the dinner reception at which this occurred took considerable effort to organize.

Although I did not see many former HCC members, I was able to interview about a dozen people at a Lutheran church in Xinzhu. Located in the center of this new high-tech city developed by the government to attract investment from overseas Chinese, the church has a membership of about 300 adults, more than half of whom are highly educated professionals returned from North America. Some had been Christian before going to North America, and others had converted at a Chinese church in North America. Almost all keep some contact with their former

churches or at least with close friends from their North American churches. The format of the Sunday service at this Lutheran church in Taiwan struck me as very similar to that in the Baptist and independent Chinese churches in the United States. Some Sunday school classes for children and youth were held in English. The pastor received a seminary degree in the United States, and in his preaching he frequently referred to his living and studying experiences in North America, inserting English words and phrases here and there in his Mandarin sermon.

Mr. Hiah, who represents the third type of returnees, was a member of the Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington, D.C. (CCC) (see Yang 1999). Dr. Hiah and his wife were born in mainland China and left for Taiwan in 1949 as small children. In the United States, after studying in the Midwest and working in the South, they settled in the Washington, D.C., area. They were active at the CCC and its fellowship groups. In 1992, having been laid off because of the economic downturn, Mr. Hiah left for Taiwan, where he started his own consulting firm. However, Mrs. Hiah and their school-age children stayed behind so that their education would not be interrupted. After resisting the idea of resettling in Taipei and finding it difficult to locate a suitable job in the United States, Mr. Hiah has finally routinized his transnational life—having long phone calls with his wife and children every week, flying back once every few months, and flying his wife and children to Taiwan during summer or winter breaks. As part of this process of settling down as a transnational, Mr. Hiah finally agreed to accept a council chair position in his Taipei church. This is the church where he was baptized as a youth. His experiences in the United States are respected, and his leadership abilities are put to use. In the summer of 2000, when I visited him, he was trying to reorganize the congregation according to the model he had learned in Chinese Christian churches in the United States.

Although both the Wang and Hiah families are from Taipei and living there now, they do not know each other. However, they are well acquainted with the parachurch organizations whose leaders I was interviewing. They told me that they had both benefited from and contributed to the Campus Evangelical Fellowship (CEF) and the Cosmic Light Christian Organization (CL).

The CEF was formed in 1957 in Taiwan with the goal to evangelize and spiritually nourish college and high school students. It holds winter and summer camps, evangelistic meetings, and gospel lectures; organizes Bible study and fellowship groups; and publishes evangelistic magazines and newsletters. In 1966, responding to the needs of people who had gone abroad, CEF started a newsletter specially designed for overseas Chinese students, and later it organized a board of directors in North America in order to keep in contact with people and to mobilize support resources for itself. In 1992, CEF launched the magazine *Overseas Campus* in Los Angeles, especially targeting students and scholars from mainland

China. The CEF general secretary in Taipei now goes to North America and Europe several times annually to lead evangelistic meetings. A founding member of HCC, now an elder at a daughter church in Houston, was a former staff member of CEF in Taipei. Some members of HCC and its daughter churches had participated in CEF activities in Taiwan before immigration, more have read CEF magazines and newsletters, and they continue to support it by donating money and introducing new readers to its publications.

The CL was founded in 1973 with two goals: reaching youth through social services and organizing scholarly research on Chinese church history. Both ministries have received financial and other support from North American Chinese Christian individuals and churches. Its general secretary, Dr. Chih-ping Lin, has made several preaching and lecturing tours in North America. Since 1999, he has visited Houston a couple of times, during which he gave talks at HCC. While his visits followed preexisting ties between CL and some church members, closer ties have been forged since his son came to Houston as an international student in 1999 and began attending HCC. The preexisting and new informal ties thus have been transformed into formal ones, nourished by personal relationships.

Since 1998, the senior pastor of HCC, Rev. David Chan, has made several official trips to Taiwan. Although he is not from Taiwan, his knowledge, experience, and the success of HCC are well known there, thanks in part to the returned immigrants who used to attend HCC. Subsequently, Rev. Chan was invited to direct leadership training workshops at churches there and to teach intensive short courses at the China Evangelical Seminary (CES).

The CES was established in 1970 in Taiwan as an evangelical, nondenominational, graduate seminary. Two American-trained Chinese Christians became the first CES provost and dean. The first president was Hudson Taylor III, the grandson of the man who established the China Inland Mission, once the largest missionary organization in China. Since 1980, three consecutive CES presidents have been ethnic Chinese who have had extensive experience in the United States. Two of them, on completing their terms at CES, returned to the United States to minister to Chinese churches. Like CGST in Hong Kong, almost all CES faculty members received their theological education in North America or Europe, and many are American citizens. By 2000, a total of 960 people had graduated from CES. Among them, 120 came to the United States to pastor Chinese churches or to work for Christian organizations. The CES has boards of trustees in the United States and other countries, and in 1986, CES began to offer extension programs in Los Angeles; New Brunswick, New Jersey; and Philadelphia. In 1998, CES established a permanent North American campus in the Los Angeles area. Every year, CES sends its faculty to teach courses in the United States. People from more than 130 Chinese churches in North America have taken courses at the Los Angeles campus and at other extension programs.

In addition to the fact that Rev. Chan teaches short courses at CES in Taipei, HCC financially supports the seminary and has sent seminarians to it. One of them is Elder Chiu, who was born in China; grew up in Taiwan, where he earned an engineering degree; and then immigrated to Brazil, where he and his family converted to Christianity at a Chinese church. Later they immigrated to Houston, joined HCC, and soon became lay leaders. In 1996, the Chius sold their business and house and became full-time missionaries to Kazakhstan, a central Asian republic of the former Soviet Union. After three years, they took a leave from the mission to spend a year in Taiwan attending CES as well as caring for their aged and ailing parents there. When I visited Taipei in the summer of 2000, the Chius had just left to return to Kazakhstan.

The HCC's transnational ties with Taiwan were further extended after the earthquake on September 21, 1999, that killed hundreds of people and devastated central Taiwan. Responding to calls from Taiwan, HCC joined the relief effort by sending teams of volunteers as well as donations of money and clothes. Several HCC volunteer teams were hosted by a local church. While helping in rescue and evangelic efforts alongside the local church, some HCC volunteers became fascinated by the liveliness of such new-wave charismatic practices of the host church as spiritual singing and spontaneous prayers. Some HCC team leaders were so moved that they brought back to Houston the fresh ideas and worship practices that they had just learned in Taiwan and put them into practice. Again, while money flows mostly from HCC to Taiwan, new ideas and practices are apparently two way.

## China

While it was difficult to meet many returnees in Taipei, it was simply impossible to do so in mainland China. The HCC members from the People's Republic of China, about 20 percent of the current membership and increasing rapidly, come from different provinces in the vast land of China. Moreover, because of political reasons, many mainland Chinese who converted to Christianity while in the United States do not want their Christian faith known to others; some were actually baptized without the presence of the congregation. These converts include people who came as visiting scholars and international students and their spouses. Because of U.S. immigration restrictions, most of these people had to return to China after a few months or years in the United States. The converts also include the visiting parents of immigrant professionals, visiting scholars, and international students. After their return to China, they maintain contact with HCC through their family members and/or close friends who may send or bring them audio- and videotapes of sermons and Christian books and magazines. However, these

returnees in China are so widely scattered that in no way can they form a group or community.

Many people from China have also settled down in the United States as permanent residents or naturalized citizens, and they commonly have relatives in China whom they visit often. With the increasing globalization of capital, some also make business trips to China on behalf of American companies. In the summer of 2000, I interviewed several people who were stationed in big cities in China. These people attended universities in the United States and then found employment with an American company. When these companies opened an office or plant in China, they were sent to work there, taking advantage of their knowledge of the local language and culture. These returnees commonly said that they would return to the United States after completing their assignments. The Christians among them often bring their evangelistic zeal to China with them in the same manner as those going back to Taiwan to work.

The transnational ties between HCC and China also include some older people who were born in mainland China but came to the United States as immigrants from Taiwan or Hong Kong. An old couple in their seventies who grew up in China and lived in Hong Kong before immigration have visited their original hometown in Fujian several times, where they have contributed money to build a new church. Another longtime member of HCC who migrated to Taiwan and then the United States has also visited mainland China many times. During one such visit in the early 1990s, he saw some issues of *Tian Feng*, the official magazine published in Nanjing by the government-sanctioned China Christian Council. He was excited by its reports of rapidly growing churches throughout China and was moved to share that information with fellow Chinese Christians in America. After returning to Houston, he began to periodically reprint selected articles from *Tian Feng* and send them to Chinese churches throughout North America. After a couple of years of this one-man operation, his resources were exhausted, and he failed to win enough support from HCC or other churches to continue.

Many American-born children of immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other places have visited China as well. Since the 1980s, HCC has sent college students to China during the summer to learn the Chinese language, to teach English, and to discreetly evangelize. Some of these young people have extended their stay in China for a year or two. When they return to Houston, they bring transnational ties with new friends made in China. Some youth have dedicated themselves to evangelism and attended a seminary in preparation for a missionary career. A church member has established a memorial fund at HCC specifically designated to support this and similar missions to mainland China.

There are also "tent-making" missionaries to China. Such missionaries are Christians who go to China as ordinary workers or business owners, not as professional



missionaries, but are motivated primarily by the desire to save souls. These are not necessarily people who originally came from China. For instance, one young couple in their thirties have gone there this way. This couple came from Hong Kong and Singapore to study in Houston, met at HCC, married, found professional jobs, and settled down. However, in 1998 they gave up their jobs and moved to China, where they found jobs in an American company. The HCC does not officially provide them with any financial support, although they received a send-off ceremony by the congregation before leaving for China. They did not want to be designated as missionaries in any official records in order to avoid suspicion by the Chinese authorities. While working in China, they travel to Houston, Hong Kong, and Singapore every few months, and their prayer letters are sent regularly to close church friends in these places. Their friends and others regularly pray for them, and some are encouraged and inspired to follow suit.

An additional transnational connection that dates to the mid-1980s involves pastors and lay leaders of HCC's daughter churches going to China to provide theological training to leaders of underground churches. These trips are usually organized and arranged by Christian organizations and individual contacts. From the standpoint of HCC, such trips are private and informal.

Apparently, the transnational religious ties between HCC and mainland China remain mostly informal in nature. This is primarily because the Chinese government is highly suspicious of Christians and Christian churches. It tries very hard to control all religious groups and strongly discourages unsupervised exchanges between Christians in China and those in the United States. When China opens up, however, the existing informal ties that HCC and its members have developed may be easily transformed into formal ties with Christian leaders, churches, and parachurch organizations there.

## Other Places

The cosmopolitan membership of HCC also includes ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asian countries, especially Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, but also from Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Korea, Japan, and so on. Some other members are ethnic Chinese from Europe (England, Germany, and France), from South and Central America (Brazil, Peru, and Panama), from Australia and New Zealand, and from South Africa. Depending on the size of the ethnic Chinese community in those countries and depending on their personal situations, these HCC members maintain varying transnational ties with their places of origin.

The transnational ties with Singapore are many and active. As mentioned earlier, a Singaporean managed a website in Hong Kong that posted sermons by

Associate Pastor Rev. Hsueh. Reverend Chan, the senior pastor, used to teach at a seminary in Singapore. Every couple of years, he goes back to Singapore to preach, lecture, or lead retreats. At one retreat camp in the 1990s, a young woman came up to him to ask for help in going to the United States to study music. A few months later, Rev. Chan welcomed her at a Houston airport. She quickly joined the church's music worship team and became an active leader of a fellowship group. She met a young man from Hong Kong at the church, and subsequently Rev. Chan married them. Before long, he sent this young couple away as tent-making missionaries to east Asia. Because of the attraction of the successful English and Chinese ministries, some ethnic Chinese from other Southeast Asian countries who came to the United States as international students have also joined HCC.

The HCC supports missionaries in other parts of Asia, including Macao, Thailand, and Burma, and tent-making missionaries to Islamic nations; and, as mentioned earlier, in 1998 it established a mission church in Kazakhstan. In the mid-1990s, in cooperation with a Chinese Christian missionary organization (the Great Commission Center, then based in Dallas, Texas, but now in San Francisco), several HCC leaders went to the former Soviet Union to explore mission opportunities. They visited Russian Siberia and central Asia and eventually chose Kazakhstan, where a sizable Chinese community existed and seemed open to the Christian gospel. The HCC sent one of its lay leaders as a full-time missionary, and every year several short-term mission teams go over to help him out. After a few years of hard work, and in part because of continuous Chinese immigration to that region, the mission church has grown in size and become stable. Some converts there have been sent for seminary education in preparation for indigenous leadership. Reverend Chan envisions that from this core more churches can be established in central Asia to evangelize not just ethnic Chinese but other people as well.

Closer to home in South and Central America, Chinese communities exist in a number of countries. Soon after its founding in 1975, HCC began sending missionaries to Panama and other Central American nations, and during the 1990s the church annually sent short-term mission teams to Central America and sometimes also to South America. Connections with South America have been frequent since the 1980s. Elder Chiu, the missionary to Kazakhstan, and his family were longtime immigrants in Brazil, where they had converted and joined a Chinese church. Later, following a close friend from that church who had immigrated to Houston and liked HCC, the Chiu family came to Houston, where he became a very active lay leader. These immigrants from Brazil maintained contact with their former church there, and since becoming missionaries the Chius have been invited back to preach at the Chinese church in Brazil.

## Analysis and Reflection

The HCC maintains diverse transnational networks—personal and organizational, formal as well as informal—with many parts of the world. This chapter provides only a brief account of some of the transnational ties that were visible to me during short periods of fieldwork in Houston, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. Many more transnational ties exist on various levels in various forms with various effects. Three factors are especially important for the ability of this church to maintain such rich and varied transnational networks: cosmopolitan membership, organizational independence, and theological evangelism. The HCC members are from various parts of the world, and many people had previously migrated to various places before moving to Houston; in addition, some have moved from Houston back to Asia. These personal connections make diverse transnational ties possible. The HCC is a nondenominational church, and therefore decisions are made solely by the congregation to maintain or develop formal ties with other parts of the world; it does not have to channel resources through a denomination. Because the members are of diverse origins and religious backgrounds and because all can participate in the decision-making process, diverse transnational ties become necessary. Finally, evangelicalism drives the church to actively maintain and seek transnational ties with various parts of the world.

How typical is HCC in its transnational networks? Do other Chinese churches maintain similar numbers and types of transnational ties? My observations of and research in numerous Chinese churches in the United States indicate that HCC is not an exceptional case. Like HCC, most Chinese immigrant churches in the United States are cosmopolitan in membership, independent in organization, and evangelical in theology (Yang 1999), making diverse transnationalism both possible and necessary. Because HCC is bigger in membership than most other Chinese churches in the United States, however, it is a more active node in Chinese Christian transnational networks; midsize and small churches may not be as active as HCC in maintaining and developing transnational ties. Nevertheless, the diverse nature of transnationalism is quite common today in Chinese churches in the United States. For example, even a very small Chinese church in Maine, with a Sunday attendance of only about twenty adults, has a cosmopolitan membership; some members are from Taiwan, some from Hong Kong, some from mainland China, and one is an ethnic Chinese from Malaysia who married a Caucasian and produced three biracial children. One Taiwanese-born woman was sent by her parents to Singapore for school and came to the United States for a college education. Her parents, who fled from mainland China to Taiwan in 1949, intentionally scattered the family. They maintain a home base in Taiwan and have “planted” their sons and daughters in Malaysia, Singapore, Hawaii, California, and New

England. The cosmopolitan membership of this small church maintains diverse transnational networks on the individual level, but the church has also extended formal financial support to missionaries and organizations in Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, and even Africa.

In most Chinese churches in the United States today, the great majority of members are well-educated, middle- or upper-middle-class professionals. This means that they possess important resources in the form of social, cultural, and economic capital, making it possible to maintain diverse transnational networks. However, some Chinese immigrant churches may be exceptional in that they insist on being monolingual or monodialect, using a language that has limited appeal, such as Cantonese, Taiwanese, or Chaozhou (Swato) (Chuck 1996). Some churches in Chinatowns or in isolated communities in which members may be mostly lower-middle or working class may maintain merely biregional transnational ties. However, based on the information I have, such churches are few.

The HCC is only one of many nodes in the numerous worldwide Chinese Christian networks. In order to see the whole picture or gain a more comprehensive understanding of such networks, it would be necessary to trace transnational ties that emanate from other types of nodes, such as those of the parachurch organizations, seminaries, or influential individuals, but this is well beyond the scope of this one project or chapter.

## Notes

1. The many American and European denominations had different missionary territories in China and Southeast Asia; indigenous Chinese sectarian or denominational groups formed and developed in particular regions.

2. This church was given the pseudonym "Chinese Gospel Church" in Yang (2000). I decided to use real names in this chapter because most of the organizations and its leaders in HCC's transnational network are unique or distinctively recognizable, so pseudonyms fail to protect the subjects but do obstruct the description. I keep pseudonyms for persons who have not been in key leadership positions in HCC and other Chinese Christian organizations.

3. For a discussion of the fieldwork in Houston, see Yang (2000).

4. There had been a Chinese Baptist church in Houston before the establishment of HCC. The members of that Chinese Baptist church were mostly earlier immigrants and their descendants who differ in social and cultural background from the post-1965 immigrants (see Yang 1999, 2000, 2001).

5. A parachurch organization is an independent organization with a specialized Christian ministry or ministries, such as a Christian music group or a group with the specialized mission to evangelize on a university campus. Wuthnow (1988) calls parachurch organizations "special-purpose groups."

6. When facing the uncertainty of the 1997 turnover of Hong Kong from Britain to the People's Republic of China, many Hong Kong residents migrated to Canada and the United States. Many brought out money as investment capital or bought houses with cash and may have contributed to the immigrant churches they attend.

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